

# The Spoilers.

By REX E. BEACH.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

SOLDIERS seized the young man, who made no offer at resistance, and the room became a noisy riot. Crowds surged up from below, clamoring, questioning, till some one at the head of the stairs shouted down:

"They've got Roy Glenister. He's killed McNamara," at which a murmur arose that threatened to become a cheer.

Then one of the receiver's faction called, "Let's hang him. He killed ten of our men last night." Helen winced, but Stillman, roused to a sort of malevolent courage, quieted the angry voices.

"Officer, hold these people back. I'll attend to this man. The law's in my hands and I'll make him answer."

McNamara reared himself, growling from the floor, his right arm swinging from the shoulder strangely loose and distorted, with palm twisted outward, while his battered face was hideous with pain and defeat. He growled broken maledictions at his enemy.

Roy meanwhile said nothing, for as the savage lust died in him he realized that the whirling faces before him were the faces of his enemies, that the Bronco Kid was still at large and that his vengeance was but half completed. His knees were bending; his limbs were like leaden bars, his chest a furnace of coals. As he reeled down the line of human forms, supported by his guards, he came abreast of the girl and her companion and paused, clearing his vision slowly.

"Ah, there you are!" he said thickly to the gambler and began to wrestle with his captors, baring his teeth in a grimace of painful effort, but they held him as easily as though he were a child and drew him forward, his body sagging limply, his face turned back over his shoulder.

They had him near the door when Wheaton barred their way, crying: "Hold up a minute! It's all right, Roy!"

"Aye, Bill—it's all right. We did our best, but we were done by a damned blackguard. Now he'll send me up, but I don't care. I broke him—with my naked hands. Didn't I, McNamara?" He mocked unsteadily at the boss, who cursed aloud in return, glowering like an evil mask, while Stillman ran up, disheveled and snarling trisacble.

"Take him away, I tell you! Take him to jail!"

But Wheaton held his place, while the room centered its eyes upon him, scenting some unexpected denouement. He saw it, and, in concession to a natural vanity and dramatic instinct, he threw back his head and stuffed his hands into his coat pockets, while the crowd waited. He grinned insolently at the judge and the receiver.

"This will be a day of defeats and disappointments to you, my friends. That boy won't go to jail because you will wear the shackles yourselves. Oh, you played a shrewd game, you two, with your senators, your politics and your pulls, but it's our turn now, and we'll make you dance for the mines you gutted and the robberies you've done and the men you've ruined. Thank heaven, there's one honest court,

by the *Prisco* judges. Like Sindbad's gentle, a wondrous tale took shape from the rumors. Men shouldered one another eagerly for a glimpse of the actors, and when the press streamed out, greeted it with volleys of questions. They saw the unrepentant marshal borne forth, followed by the old judge, now a pained wretch, slinking beside his captor, a very shell of a man at whom they jeered. When McNamara lurched into view, an image of defeat and chagrin, their voices rose menacingly. The pack was turning and he knew it, but, though racked and crippled, he bent upon them a visage so full of defiance and contemptuous malignity that they hushed themselves, and their final picture of him was that of a big man downed, but unbeaten to the last. They began to cry for Glenister, so that when he loomed in the doorway, a ragged, be-rote figure, his heavy shock low over his eyes, his unshaven face aggressive even in its weariness, his corded arms and chest bare beneath the fluttering streamers, the street broke into wild cheering. Here was a man of their own, a son of the northland who labored and loved and fought in a way they understood, and he had come into his due.

But Roy, dumb and listless, staggered up the street, refusing the help of every man except Wheaton. He heard his companion talking, but grasped only that the attorney gloated and gloried.

"We have whipped them, boy. We have whipped them at their own game. Arrested in their very dooryards—cited for contempt of court—that's what they are. They disobeyed those other writs, and so I got them."

"I broke his arm," muttered the miner.

"Yes, I saw you do it! Ugh! It was an awful thing! I couldn't prove conspiracy, but they'll go to jail for a little while just the same, and we have broken the ring."

"It snapped at the shoulder," the other continued dully, "just like a shovel handle. I felt it—but he tried to kill me, and I had to do it."

The attorney took Roy to his cabin and dressed his wounds, talking incessantly the while, but the boy was like a sleep-walker, displaying no elation, no excitement, no joy of victory. At last Wheaton broke out:

"Cheer up! Why, man, you act like a loser! Don't you realize that we've won? Don't you understand that the Midas is yours? And the whole world with it?"

"Won?" echoed the miner. "What do you know about it, Bill? The Midas—the world—what good are they? You're wrong. I've lost—yes—I've lost everything she taught me, and by some damned trick of fate she was there to see me do it. Now, go away! I want to sleep."

He sank upon the bed with its tangle of blankets and was unconscious before the lawyer had covered him over.

There he lay like a dead man till late in the afternoon, when Dextery and Slapjack came in from the hills, answering Wheaton's call, and fell upon him hungrily. They shook Roy into consciousness with joyous riot, pommeling him with affectionate roughness till he rose and joined with them stiffly. He laughed and rubbed the soreness from his muscles, emerging physically fit. They made him recount his adventures to the tiniest detail, following his description of the fight with absorbed interest till Dextery broke into mournful complaint:

"I'd have given my half of the Midas to see you bust him. Lord, I'd have screamed with supreme delight at that."

"Why didn't you gouge his eyes out when you had him crippled?" questioned Slapjack vindictively. "I'd 'a' done it."

Dextery continued: "They tell me that when he was arrested he swore in eighteen different languages, each one more refreshingly repulsive and vigorous than the preceding. Oh, I have sure missed a plenty today, particular because my own diction is gettin' run down an' skim milky of late, showin' a lack of new ideas, which I might have assimilated somethin' robustly original an' expressive if I'd been here. No, sir; a nose bag full of nuggets wouldn't have kept me away."

"How did it sound when she hustled?" insisted the morbid Simms, but Glenister refused to discuss the combat.

"Come on, Slap," said the old prospector; "let's go downtown. I'm so hot up I can't set still, an', besides, maybe we can get the story the way it really happened from somebody who

ain't bound an' gagged an' chloroformed by such unbecom' modesties. Roy, don't never go into rattyville with them personal episodes, because they read about as thrillin' as a cook-book. Why, say, I've had the story of that fight from four different fellows already, none of which was within four blocks of the scrimmage, an' they're all different an' all better'n your account."

Now that Glenister's mind had recovered some of its poise he realized what he had done.

"I was a beast, an animal," he growled, "and that after all my striving. I wanted to leave that part behind. I wanted to be worthy of her love and trust even though I never won it, but at the first test I am found lacking. I have lost her confidence. Yes, and what is worse, infinitely worse, I have lost my own. She's always seen me at my worst," he went on, "but I'm not that kind at bottom—not that kind. I want to do what's right, and if I have another chance I will—I know I will. I've been tried too hard, that's all."

Some one knocked, and he opened the door to admit the Bronco Kid and Helen.

"Wait a minute, old man," said the KM. "I'm here as a friend." The gambler handled himself with difficulty, offering in explanation:

"I'm all sewed up in bandages of one kind or another."

"He ought to be in bed now, but he wouldn't let me come alone, and I could not wait," the girl supplemented, while her eyes avoided Glenister's in strange hesitation.

"He wouldn't let you. I don't understand."

"I'm her brother," announced the Bronco Kid. "I've known it for a long time, but I—I—well, you understand, I couldn't let her know. All I can say is, I've gambled square till the night I played you, and I was as mad as a dervish then, blaming you for the talk I'd heard. Last night I learned by chance about Struve and Helen and got to the roadhouse in time to save her. I'm sorry I didn't kill him." His long white fingers writhed about the arm of his chair at the memory.

"Isn't he dead?" Glenister inquired.

"No. The doctors have brought him in, and he'll get well. He's like half the men in Alaska—here because the sheriffs back home couldn't shoot straight. There's something else. I'm not a good talker, but give me time and I'll manage it so you'll understand. I tried to keep Helen from coming on this errand, but she said it was the square thing and she knows better than I. It's about those papers she brought in last spring. She was afraid you might consider her a party to the deal, but you don't, do you?" He glared belligerently, and Roy replied with fervor:

"Certainly not. Go on."

"Well, she learned the other day that those documents told the whole story and contained enough proof to break up this conspiracy and convict the judge and McNamara and all the rest, but Struve kept the bundle in his safe and wouldn't give it up without a price. That's why she went away with him. She thought it was right, and—that's all. But it seems Wheaton had succeeded in another way. Now, I'm coming to the point. The judge and McNamara are arrested for contempt of court and they're as good as convicted; you have recovered your mine, and these men are disgraced. They will go to jail!"

"Yes, for six months, perhaps," broke in the other hotly, "but what does that amount to? There never was a bolder crime consummated nor one more cruelly unjust. They robbed a realm and pillaged its people, they defied a court and made justice a wanton, they jailed good men and sent others to ruin; and for this they are to suffer—how? By a paltry fine or a short imprisonment, perhaps, by an ephemeral disgrace and the loss of their stolen goods. Contempt of court is the accusation, but you might as well convict a murderer for breach of the peace. We've thrown them off, it's true, and they won't trouble us again, but they'll never have to answer for their real infamy. That will go unpunished while their lawyers quibble over technicalities and rules of court. I guess it's true that there isn't any law of God or man north of fifty-three; but if there is justice south of that mark, those people will answer for conspiracy and go to the penitentiary."

"You make it hard for me to say what I want to. I am almost sorry we came, for I am not cunning with words, and I don't know that you'll understand," said the Bronco Kid gravely. "We looked at it this way: you have had your victory, you have beaten your enemies against odds, you have recovered your mine, and they are disgraced. To men like them that last will outlive and outweigh all the rest; but the judge is our uncle and our blood runs in his veins. He took Helen when she was a baby and was a father to her in his selfish way, loving her as best he knew how. And she loves him."

"I don't quite understand you," said Roy.

And then Helen spoke for the first time eagerly, taking a packet from her bosom as she began:

"This will tell the whole wretched

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"We'll make you dance for the mines you gutted."

and I happened to find it." He turned to the strangers who had accompanied him from the ship, crying, "Serve those warrants," and they stepped forward.

The uproar of the past few minutes had brought men running from every direction till, finding no room on the stairs, they had massed in the street below while the word flew from lip to lip concerning this closing scene of their drama, the battle of the Midas, the great fight upstairs and the arrest